

Curtain calls **The good and the bad**



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The exaggerated gestures and dramatic posturings don't necessarily end when the opera does, you know. Tenor Christopher Gillett raises an eyebrow at the equally impressive theatrics on display from singers after the curtain comes down.



Now that Glyndebourne is up and running again and the various summer festivals are beginning to kick off, I thought it might be a good time to educate the opera newbie as to what to expect at the most important part of the evening.

No, I don't mean the picnic. I mean the curtain calls.

Curtain calls don't always bring out the best in opera singers, and this applies even before there's an audience in the auditorium to applaud them. Indeed, some singers will go to astonishing lengths to ensure they take their call higher up the pecking order than the size of their role may suggest – I've seen many an indignant baritone whispering furiously into the ear of the director that they are NOT taking their call before the comedy tenor. Personally, I have never understood this. Taking a bow later isn't going to improve an audience's opinion of your performance, so just shut up and go where you're told.

There are times, though, that I wish I'd cultivated the standard opera bows that are so beloved of some of my exalted colleagues.

It's all too much. 'What - moi?'

My favourite would be **The Exhausted Soprano**. The stock-in-trade for Cio-Cio Sans and Violettas, The Exhausted Soprano comes out for her call after a noticeable and deliberate delay and drags herself slowly onto the stage as if it's all too much (clutching the curtain if she possibly can). When the audience erupts,

she gives them a look of utter surprise as if to say 'What – *moi?*' – before sinking into a curtsey so deep you wonder if she will ever get up.

The Pants Role is the call employed by the perky mezzo who, curiously, is much livelier than The Exhausted Soprano, despite having been on stage a lot longer. She skips on stage like a puppy who has just drunk three Red Bulls and blows kisses at the orchestra, even though half of them have already left.

The Jolly Baritone looks like he's about to invite everyone to the pub. He may even applaud the audience.

The Famous Bass enters with the air of someone who believes that applause is beneath him. He knows he's good, thank you very much, and doesn't so much bow as slightly tilt his head, all the while fixing the audience with a look of mild contempt.

Then there's **The Football Tenor**. He comes bounding on as if he's just scored the winning goal, blows kisses to everyone in the crowd, holds his arms out in supplication to his own talent and probably puts a hand on his heart for good measure. He loves everybody (except The Exhausted Soprano, whom he loathes with a passion).



Franco Bonisoli, as barmy as a bag of bees, was a fan of The Football Tenor. The only time I sang with him, he insisted that we kept going out to bow over and over again, long after half the audience had left, while those remaining studied their watches and clapped out of politeness. 'It is our food!' he exclaimed as he dragged us on yet again.

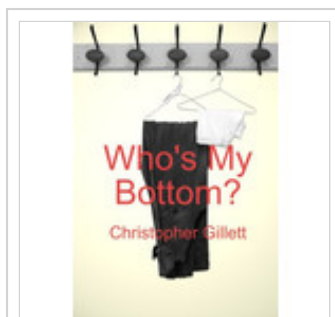
But the only food I was interested in was the sandwich I would eventually get to eat on the train home.

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Read more of Christopher's musings on his blog, christophergillett.co.uk (<http://christophergillett.co.uk>).

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